



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

FIVE MORE DEFENDANTS SENTENCED IN OPERATION COCAINE COWBOYS

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that five defendants – four Carthage, Mo., residents and a Texas man – were sentenced today for their role in a conspiracy to distribute cocaine and methamphetamine. All five defendants were indicted as part of Operation Cocaine Cowboys, which charged 36 federal defendants with illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales in Jasper County and elsewhere in southwest Missouri.

The five defendants sentenced in federal court in Springfield today were named in a federal indictment and a separate federal criminal complaint, Graves said, which were both part of a series of federal indictments and federal criminal complaints filed in January and February 2002 as a result of the 27-month multi-agency investigation into illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales.

Operation Cocaine Cowboys focused on an organization of individuals who allegedly were responsible for the delivery and distribution of multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana and other drugs from sources in California, Texas and Guatemala. As charged in a series of federal indictments and federal criminal complaints, Graves explained, 36 federal defendants allegedly distributed illegal narcotics, primarily in Jasper County, but also in at least four other southwest Missouri counties (Christian, Greene, Lawrence and Webster) and elsewhere. Graves said that undercover officers made numerous purchases of illegal drugs and weapons as part of the investigation. In addition to the 36 federal defendants, about 26 other individuals, including adults and juveniles, face a variety of state charges in related cases, primarily in Jasper County.

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Four co-defendants in the case of *United States v. Domingo Rodriguez, Jr., et al* were sentenced by U.S. District Judge Scott O. Wright today. According to Graves, each of the four defendants previously pleaded guilty to various charges in the eight-count criminal complaint that alleged a conspiracy to distribute cocaine and marijuana, from at least May 2001 to the present, in Jasper and Greene counties and elsewhere.

* **Domingo Rodriguez, Jr.**, 45, of Carthage, was sentenced to two years in prison without parole.

* **Melba Rodriguez**, 46, of Carthage, (wife of Domingo Rodriguez, Jr.), was sentenced to one year and one day in prison without parole.

* **Lisa Mireles**, 22, of Carthage, was sentenced to three years of probation.

* **Roberto Ponce, Jr.**, 44, of Rio Grande City, Texas, was sentenced to one year in prison without parole.

Two defendants in the case of *United States v. Martin Macias, et al* were scheduled to be sentenced by U.S. District Judge Scott O. Wright today. According to Graves, each of the defendants pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine and 500 grams or more of methamphetamine, from at least November 1999 to September 2001, in Jasper County and elsewhere.

* **Michele K. Huerta**, 30, of Carthage, was sentenced to three years of probation.

* **David Mata**, 26, of Carthage, was scheduled to be sentenced today but failed to appear at today's sentencing hearing. **Mata's** bond has been revoked, and an arrest warrant was issued by the court.

Additional Defendants

* **Victoria Gonzalez**, 25, of Carthage, pleaded guilty on May 6, 2002 to conspiring with others to distribute cocaine and methamphetamine in Jasper County, from at least as early as November of 1999, continuing to on or about September 6, 2001. By pleading guilty, **Gonzalez** also agreed to the federal forfeiture of \$31,140. As a result of her plea agreement, **Gonzalez** could be subject to a sentence of up to 20 years in prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$1 million. The sentence will be determined according to the United States Sentencing Guidelines. Her sentencing hearing will be scheduled sometime after the completion of a presentence investigation by the U.S. Probation Office.

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* **Antonio C. Macias**, 33, of Carthage, was convicted on May 13, 2002, of all federal charges related to the conspiracy to distribute cocaine and methamphetamine. **Antonio Macias** was charged in 11 counts contained in a 22-count indictment. As a result of his conviction, **Antonio Macias** could be subject to a sentence of up to life imprisonment plus 180 years in prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$14 million. The sentence will be determined according to the United States Sentencing Guidelines. His sentencing hearing will be scheduled sometime after the completion of a presentence investigation by the U.S. Probation Office.

* **Martin Macias**, 34, and **Jose Macias**, 19, who are brothers, both of Carthage, pleaded guilty on May 13, 2002, to conspiring with others to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine and 500 grams or more of methamphetamine in Jasper County, from as early as November, 1999 to on or about September 6, 2001. By pleading guilty, **Martin Macias** also agreed to the federal forfeiture of \$31,140 in proceeds obtained from those violations, for which all the defendants are jointly and severally liable. As a result of their plea agreements, **Martin Macias** and **Jose Macias** could each be subject to a sentence of up to life imprisonment without parole, plus a fine up to \$4 million. Their sentences will be determined according to the United States Sentencing Guidelines. Sentencing hearings will be scheduled after the completion of presentence investigations by the U. S. Probation Office.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. Operation Cocaine Cowboys was investigated by officers from the Missouri State Highway Patrol and the Combined Ozarks Multijurisdictional Enforcement Team (COMET), in cooperation with numerous other law enforcement agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol, tobacco and Firearms, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Jasper County Drug Task Force, Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center (MOCIC), and the Carthage Police Department. Assistance to Operation Cocaine Cowboys was provided by the Greene, Jasper and Stone county sheriff's departments, the Joplin, Springfield, Oronogo and Webb City police departments, and the U.S. Marshals Service.
